

11.14 Key Personalities of Dayparts

MORNING DRIVE: Most morning jocks are friendly, funny and entertaining, all keys to relating to the target audience. Morning jocks generally talk more than air talent in other dayparts because their shows are especially service oriented. Morning-drive air talent are more than mere jokesters—they *provide the day's survival information to the audience*: how cold (or hot) it will be, whether it will rain (or snow), what time it is, frequent updates on traffic problems that will keep them from dropping the kids at daycare and getting to work on time and so on. Reports of a pile-up on one expressway give listeners a chance to switch their commuter routes—and the station a chance to earn a brownie point.

Traditionally, morning drive lasted from 6 to 10 A.M., and it is still defined that way by Arbitron. For PDs and morning jocks, however, the reality could be different. People are spending more and more time in their cars as the suburbs surrounding many large urban areas continue to sprawl outward. Commutes take new forms (suburb to suburb rather than suburb to city), and people's work schedules have changed to incorporate flex time or earlier (or later) shifts. As a result, the real "drivetime" has extended. In many markets, traffic builds to significant volume by 5:30 or even 5 A.M. Therefore, most large-market stations and some midmarket stations begin their morning shows at those earlier times. Some also end earlier, getting to their midday programming by 9 A.M.

Morning jocks are often paired in teams of a lead DJ and a sidekick—someone to bounce jokes off of—or a co-anchor who can add to the act—commonly a male plus a female. On most stations, the morning jock is the only performer permitted to violate format to any appreciable extent (the "morning zoo" approach). Indeed, morning can be almost music-free on some music stations. Normally, morning drivetime personalities are also the most highly paid, but with that pay comes greater pressure. They have a greater responsibility than other jocks because the

audience is bigger in the time period than at any other time of day, and stations earn a substantial part (if not a majority) of their revenue during that daypart. For most stations, "If you don't make it in the morning drive, you don't make it at all." But how far are you willing to go to make it?

In many major markets, shock jocks rule the morning airwaves, at least among the male audience aged 18 to 49. These hosts (almost all are men) target that group with a mix of crude sexual humor and innuendo, risqué audience phone calls and titillating interviews with pop culture icons from athletes to porn stars. Some of the best known, such as Howard Stern and Opie & Anthony, have left broadcast radio for less restrictive satellite or online services. And the shock format is not confined entirely to mornings. Although some stations downplay personality in favor of heavy doses of music after 9 A.M., some practitioners of crude humor have found success (at least for limited times) in afternoon drivetime or evenings. Most large or medium markets probably have at least one performer, local or via syndication, that might be described in this vein. Some of the more well-known names often associated with this style (or who have at least attracted regular attention from the FCC for on-air antics) besides those listed above include Doug "Grease-man" Tracht, Mancow Muller and Bubba the Love Sponge.

The question for programmers is always, "What is best for the station in my situation?" A number of factors affect the decision as to whether the station should go the shock route—including the target audience and the market's taste for the material, the talent's track record (in terms of ratings and FCC enforcement), and the station owner's content policies and expectations for revenue. These performers can be consistent moneymakers, but the price can be steep. Some advertisers will shy away, no matter how big the ratings get. There is no easy answer, nor one that is correct for all stations in all markets. Programmers need to carefully juggle competing needs when selecting morning talent. *If you were programming a low- or mid-rated rock*

more conversational, upbeat station voice with phrases like "more music while you work," or "today's hits and all your favorites."

The imaging will always incorporate the name of the station in some way, and can be used in the

form of sweepers, liners and jingles. In the past, imaging could last as long as 30 seconds, but the recent trend is to keep them as short as possible—sometimes as short as 5 or 8 seconds. The PD will work closely with the imaging director, who is often

station with a so-so morning show, and Mancow was available in your market, what would you do?

MIDDAY: The midday jock is frequently conversational in style, warm and friendly. Incidental services (requiring talk) during this daypart normally are curtailed—although not eliminated—in favor of longer music sweeps. Most of the audience is at work or school. Music rotations may be slowed and more recurrenents, golds and oldies added so as not to seem too repetitious to the all-day, at-work audience. Although there is still out-of-home listening during the 10 A.M. to 3 P.M. period, Arbitron data show that the majority of listeners are at home or at work. Many midday jocks capitalize on the dominantly female audience by using liners (brief continuity between songs) that have special appeal to women and by talking about what the listener might be doing at home or after work. At-work listeners may also be targeted through daytime-specific promotions (giving away lunch to everybody in the office after entrants have mailed in business cards or faxed in requests, for example). Noontime may lend itself to special programming as people leave the office or take a break from work; for example, the all-request “dinner” hours popular on many country, AC, oldies and rock stations.

AFTERNOON DRIVE: The afternoon jock (3 to 7 P.M.) is more up-tempo, as is the music rotation during this period if the station is dayparting. Teens are out of school, and adults are driving home from work. In small markets, this necessitates a delicate balance between teen-oriented music and music suiting the moods and attitudes of the going-home audience. Again, weather and traffic are important in this period (especially traffic), although not quite as much as in the morning. Information is more likely to take the form of the afternoon jock alluding frequently to evening activities—about how good it is to finish work and to look forward to whatever events people in your audience will be a part of that evening—a concert, a ball game, a

movie sneak preview and so on. By Thursday, and certainly on Friday, weekend plans become a focus.

EVENING: More teens and young adults are available to listen at night, making this daypart especially strong for CHR and urban stations, as well as younger-skewing rock or country stations. The ability to use listener phone calls on the air, juggling the phones along with music and everything else, is an essential ingredient of many CHR evening jocks’ shows. They may open the request lines and play specific records for specific people, get listeners to introduce songs or play along with pranks, or engage in short funny bits (with the calls always edited before playback).

Because the majority of adults over 25 are doing something other than listening to the radio (most often watching television, dealing with children and household chores and so on), AC stations, older rock outlets and other adult formats may try slightly altering their programming in the evening to attract an audience. Syndicated programs such as *Delilah* or *Rockline* offer programming that is different yet similar enough to have broad appeal for the AC or rock audience.

OVERNIGHTS: Only large-market stations typically still have live air talent in overnights, from midnight to 6 A.M. But regardless of whether the shift is live or voice tracked, the jock’s attitude is usually one of camaraderie. “We’re all up late tonight, aren’t we? We have to work nights and sleep days.” This jock must commune with the audience: the taxi drivers, revelers, police officers, all-night restaurant and grocery store workers, insomniacs, parents up giving babies two o’clock feedings, shift workers at factories, bakers and the many others active between the hours of midnight and 6 A.M. The commercial load is almost nil during this period, so the jock can provide listeners with a lot of uninterrupted music. If they’re not voice tracking it, many stations will run network or syndicated material here to save on costs or use some of this time period to offer public-affairs programming.

one of the on-air personalities or the production director, to establish the overall idea, and then the imaging director will complete the clips and place them into the automation system for use in rotation.

Most stations will use *sweepers* between songs during music sweeps (hence the name). These short, highly produced imaging elements include the call letters, an identifying slogan, or air talent identifier. They move the audience from one song

to the next while reminding them of the station they're listening to (for diary purposes) and reinforcing the station's image, often by making aural connections between other elements of popular culture and the station. Companies like TM Studios (www.tmstudios.com) can provide produced imaging spots or just the production elements (music, sound effects, drop-ins from popular movies or TV shows) for local producers to use in creating these important pieces. Music skills as well as creative audio production abilities are valuable commodities in this regard. Some companies will differentiate between different types of sweepers by assigning them different names including **stabs** or **quickies**, or categorize them into (a) **sweeps**, (b) **sweeps**, and (c) **sweeps**.

Liners serve a similar imaging and transitional purpose but are simple scripted voice tracks or live reads without music or effects. They can be used to promote upcoming station events, music coming up after the break, or a general image for the station. To be effective, however, liners must be kept fresh, constantly rewritten and replaced.

Singing *jingles*, sometimes as long as 30 or 60 seconds, were frequently the centerpiece of station imaging in most formats other than AOR prior to the mid-1980s. Companies like JAM Creative Productions (www.jingles.com) still produce short, custom radio IDs and jingles that consist of a few bars of music with the station call letters and identifying slogan sung over them. Producers create several versions for use between songs of different tempos and in different day-parts. Stations that purchase a jingle package generally receive not only complete jingles but also the individual components (music tracks, vocal elements, and so on) that they can remix themselves. Although available for nearly any format, they are seldom used today except on oldies, AC and country stations (as well as some news and talk outlets). Historically-minded readers can find examples of older jingles at both the JAM website and at www.pams.com (PAMS Productions was one of the original jingle producers in the 1950s).

The Spots

Just as there is no one “right” way to program a radio station, there is *no single set of clock formulas that will drive a station to the top of the market*. Remember that a change in one area of the clock will also change other aspects of the clock. Increasing the number of commercials per hour to satisfy demands for higher revenues means less room in a given hour for music. Less music on a music intensive station means fewer listeners, which in turn leads to lower ratings, and then to lower revenues in the long run. Spot loads will vary considerably, depending on the format. For example, news-talk stations historically carry the heaviest spot loads—potentially as many as 18 or 20 minutes per hour. Music intensive stations, however, generally do best running between 8 to 12 minutes per hour. This number may increase slightly during morning drive when music is less of a focus (and the ads have greater value).

Finding this delicate balance is often the work of intense negotiation between the PD, the sales manager and the general manager. Once an agreement is made, there should be no deviation from the plan until the time comes for a re-negotiation of the current terms. Most companies will decide on one of two systems by which to set the number of avails in an hour, either by units or by time.

In a unit system, there is a definite *number* of avails in a given hour, regardless of the duration of a spot. Most radio commercials are either (:30) or (:60) in length, but in a unit system, length is of little concern. If the consensus of management is to run three stopsets an hour with three avails per stopset, there are only ever nine avails per hour, and stopsets can be filled with any combination of spots. For example, the stopset could only ever be as long as three minutes (three sixty's), or as short as a minute and a half (three thirties). The stopset could also be comprised of two sixties and a thirty, or two thirties and a sixty, but never more than three commercials running back-to-back. This strategy is employed more often by programming-driven companies, and often times both the listener and the advertiser win;

the listener knows that the commercial breaks are usually short, and the advertiser knows they won't be lost in the clutter. Also by limiting the number of avails, a station can charge a premium price for each of the avails because fewer exist.

In a time system, management agrees to allow for a certain number of minutes per stopset. Using the previous example of three stopsets an hour, now with three minutes of avails per stopset, the commercial load could significantly increase, and spot duration is of the utmost concern. In this scenario, the stopset will still only be a maximum of three minutes in length but could contain as many as six spots per break, or conceivably as many as eighteen in a given hour if all of the spots are (:30) in duration. According to a stopwatch, the same duration of time has passed (three minutes) but perceptually the listener has endured as many as six commercials in one break. The danger in this scenario is that listeners will perceive the station as having “too many commercials,” and may be inclined to tune to another station as soon as they hear the first commercial. For the station's relationship with advertisers, there can be concerns about perceptions of clutter.

In these cases, stations may try to change listener perception by having long music sweeps. Remember a change to one area of the clock means changes to other areas of the clock. Stations running “10 songs in a row,” or “50 minute music hours” leave room for only one or two very long breaks. A listener staying through a ten-song sweep will have been tuned in for 35 to 45 minutes, or three quarter hours. The tradeoff is the six- or eight-minute commercial break that follows and the second long stopset that will come up after just one or two more songs. The strategy may work, at least in the short run, if everybody in the market follows along. The risk is that a heavier-than-normal spot load opens a station up to attack by a “more music” competitor.

Perceptions that audiences consider commercials to be, at best, a necessary evil, have led stations to have kicked off new formats with no commercial load whatsoever. In 2004 Nine-FM (WRZA, 99.9) launched in Chicago with 9,999 songs in a row and a promise to restrict the commercial load to just nine

units per hour afterward. A risk-filled tension always exists between the number of commercials and the number of interruptions that can be tolerated. Setting the audience up to believe that commercials will be non-existent or severely restricted makes the likelihood of long-term station success very limited—the revenue has to come from somewhere, and advertising is usually the most efficient means of generating substantial revenue (if you have a substantial audience). *One key to understanding radio programming strategy is to compare stations with regard to commercial load and the number of interruptions per hour (stopsets).* Because advertising is necessary to keep the lights on, management must establish a policy that is reflected in clocks and stick to it (see 11.15).

The Clock in Practice

Once all of the elements are established—the music is assembled into categories, the station imaging is in place, the number and duration of stopsets are decided upon and the air talent is selected—then

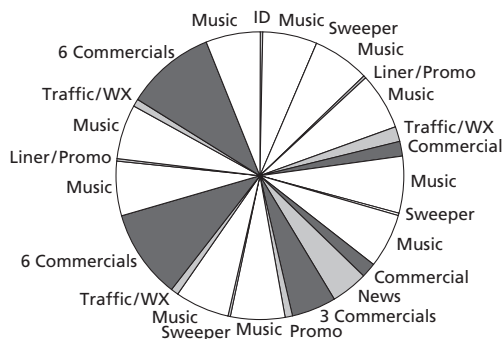
11.15 Quality in Commercials

Spot quality and production is critical to the station and advertiser's success. Too often, radio spots (including promos and PSAs) are full of clichéd copy and fail to grab the audience's attention. Listeners don't so much hate commercials as they hate poorly executed, pointless commercials that don't address a recognizable need of the audience. Commercials should sell the audience on the product or service by explaining how that product or service fills some need or desire, and they must complement the format rather than clash with it. Stations that will take any spot so long as it's paid for, or rely on poorly or untrained salespeople as copywriters and producers risk alienating their audiences and failing in the long run. Stations best serve their audiences and their advertisers by making sure that the commercials they run fit the format, address the target audience directly, and are creative, effective selling tools aired in a relatively uncluttered environment.

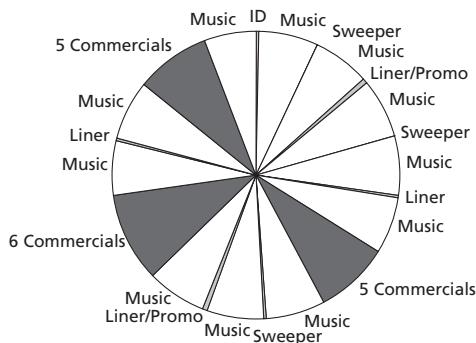
the PD can finalize the clocks and prepare them for broadcast. The clock can be created in scheduling programs like *Selector*, and the computer “knows” that at six minutes after the hour it should play the next power song. Because the computer plans ahead, it will adhere to the usual restrictions, making sure, for example, that another song by the same artist has not played recently and is not scheduled too closely in the future.

Besides structuring information (news, weather, traffic), promos and commercials, the clock also structures the music for a given hour. The music portion of an hour depends on the number of commercials to be aired. A commercial-free hour, for example, requires many more songs than an hour with 14 spots. A clock for a basic morning-drive hour designed to handle one newscast and 16 minutes of commercials appears in 11.16. This leaves room for up to 10 or 11 songs, depending on how much the DJ talks (if the station has a star morning personality, there may actually be a clock with little or no music scheduled). The music for this morning hour with approximately 10 songs might consist of four powers, two currents, two recurrences, one power gold and one gold. The service elements—news, weather, traffic—are spaced more or less evenly throughout the hour. As is typical of a contemporary music station, news has been placed in the middle of a quarter-hour. Station imaging, promotion and identification elements, either recorded or voiced live by the air talent, occur between every song.

11.16 Morning Drive



11.17 Evening Hot Clock



The clock in 11.17 is intended for an early-evening show. The music selection contains 12 songs made up of six powers, two currents, two recurrences, one power gold and one gold. Note the long music sweep from before the top of the hour until approximately 20 or 22 minutes past. This selection fits a CHR or urban contemporary station but would be different on a rock or mainstream country station (where the rotation of currents would be slower and more golds would be played). A midday clock might look similar to this one but with more golds and recurrences scheduled to slow down the current rotation a bit so at-work listeners aren't hearing the same song four or five times. The rotation pace of the currents would then pick up again during afternoon drivetime and evening.

Once the music log is completed using the clock as the template, it is merged with the traffic (commercial) log to create one seamless schedule known as a *broadcast log* that then is loaded in the on-air computer in the control room. In some cases, the log may even include scrollable live copy or other performance notes for the air talent. The automation software then will take over and play the log element by element until the jock in the control room stops it to talk on air. In voicetracked environments, the automation system will simply keep on running until interrupted. In some stations, the automation software is put in “auto” at 7 P.M. on a Friday, and is left running unattended until the morning team shows up on Monday.

Controlling “the Sound”

Many of the tricks used by program directors to control the sound of a radio station are not immediately noticeable to listeners but greatly affect the presentation of a station on-air. Perhaps you’ve heard a station that just sounds better than its competition, but you don’t know why or can’t quite put your finger on it. That sense is the cumulative result of all of the small factors that contribute to “the sound.”

Part of controlling the sound is the processing that is placed on the station. Once the audio stream leaves the control room, it passes through a series of audio processors before making it to the transmitter and eventually over the air. Most of the processors that are used in broadcast facilities have endless settings, and a good program director will work with the engineer to get the processing just right. Oftentimes this processing will use significant *compression* on the audio signal, making it “sparkle” when it hits your receiver.

Another trick programmers will use is *speeding the music*—just slightly—before it is placed into the automation system. It was falsely believed for many years that top 40 stations sped up the playback speed on their turntables slightly to fit more music (or spots) into an hour, but that wasn’t the reason. Instead, programmers speed music both to give their station more energy and thus take energy away from their competition. If you hear a song on a station that is speeding music, then tune in to the competition, that same song on the competition’s station seems to drag on which makes the competing station seem slow and boring (the kiss of death).

Even on an iPod or CD, the music will never sound the same as it does on the radio station speeding the music. A famous example was a song released called “Baker Street” by Gerry Rafferty in 1977. Most stations playing that record sped the song up significantly, and in that context the song was a huge hit, making it to #2 on the Billboard hot 100. However the album, “city to city” was one of the most returned albums in music history, because the song never sounded the same at home as it did on the radio. If people returned records because the songs didn’t sound the same, then it is likely that the same

perception would exist when comparing, for instance, two CHR stations. The listener will choose the one that makes them feel better and more energetic.

Another consideration for program directors is the overall *tightness* of the radio station—that is, how quickly the station moves from one element to the next. In the past, this was a trademark of a good DJ in the studio who was “jockeying” records, carts and tapes while also talking on air. In today’s radio environment where almost everything is automated, the degree of tightness falls back on the program director. Tightness is achieved by placing *trip tones* or *aux marks* on the audio files before they are loaded into the automation system. These trip tones are inaudible cues that tell the computer it is time to begin playing the next element on the log. Without the use of trip tones, the song (or sweeper, commercial or voicetrack) would completely fade out to “dead air” before beginning the next element (Eeek!). The more dead air, the more *listener fatigue* sets in. Subconsciously, the listener feels exhausted just from listening to the station in part because of the constant, jerky starting and stopping of audio. With proper trip tones placed on all audio, a smooth fade happens between all elements; when one song fades out, another begins before reaching dead air. This also helps to aid in the pacing of a station, keeping it moving forward and not stopping or losing momentum.

Every program director has his or her own style that influences “the sound” of the radio station and helps to provide the station with its own unique personality. No two program directors will use the same list of tricks and procedures to make their stations unique. As discussed at the beginning of this section, ultimately the listener decides the PD’s success or failure when a new ratings book is released.

Marketing and Promotion

The modern radio station pays almost as much attention to marketing as to programming. Marketing is essential for keeping a station from simply disappearing in the crowd. A carefully designed and executed social media strategy is critical for drawing

listeners to the community the station wants to create, and stations continue to use television, newspapers, billboards, bumper stickers, bus cards, cab tops and other graphic media because they also help reach the target audience. Promotional stunts have long been the special province of pop radio and involve the cooperation of programming personnel. If this chapter's hypothetical station were trying to launch in a large market, the station might need as much as \$2.5 million the first year for promotion.

Station promotion takes two forms: *on-air* and *off-air*. On-air promotion is suited for retaining current listeners through reinforcing their positive image of the station or extending the amount of time they listen through contesting or other incentives. Social media are also suited for image reinforcement and are the best means of building a stronger relationship with your existing audience. But social media platforms can also be used to attract new listeners—if your existing audience will serve in the messenger role. Creating evangelists out of your most dedicated listeners can be very effective—we all respond more favorably if we get a recommendation from somebody we know and trust. For a new station, attracting new listeners without that personal touch is increasingly difficult in a cluttered market space and requires a significant investment in off-air promotion, often in conjunction with on-air stunts and events, to have any chance of success. Going viral is the goal.

Off-air alternatives include billboards, television, online and direct mail. The first two are useful for broad market awareness; the latter two for more targeted campaigns. In a medium-sized market (500,000), television and billboard advertising might run \$25,000 a month for good exposure. It may cost five times that in a Dallas- or Chicago-sized market. Not only are unit prices higher in large markets but more territory must usually be covered. Reaching the whole population in one market with a set of painted billboards may require 35 billboards, for example, although a similar showing in Dallas would require 125 billboards at an average cost of several thousand dollars each per month.

Some markets are now utilizing digital billboards which, though more expensive per month, give the station the ability to change what is on the billboard weekly or even daily. Television advertising, which is even more expensive but often necessary for launching a new format, can help generate the kind of top-of-mind awareness among the audience that drives ratings. Occasionally, a radio station will be able to *trade* advertising with a television station, offering mutual promotion of each other's programming.

Station promotion can have three possible goals: to *build audience share* (by extending the listening of the current audience), to *build cume* (by attracting new listeners), or to simply *enhance the audience's expectations* of the station without having to meet an immediate ratings goal (positioning). In any case, it is essential that the promotional effort be focused on the listener and the specific goal if it is to succeed. Too often, promotions happen because of advertisers' or a station's own economic concerns rather than through a focused attempt to achieve one or more of these three goals (see 11.11, which discusses the way the industry pays to get songs on the air).

Contests can build the station's share of audience if they are constructed to extend a listener's time spent with the station (see 11.18). Thus, their elements need to stretch over multiple quarter hours (but be careful not to overdo it). To build the cumulative audience, a sufficient budget is needed for reaching and enticing potential listeners with billboards, print or television or direct mail. In addition, stations should concentrate their efforts on one promotion at a time. Multiple concurrent promotions simply dilute the impact of each and may confuse and frustrate listeners. At the same time, plenty of FCC rules and regulations apply to contests and other station promotion (see 11.19).

Community involvement projects are as important as contests for programming and promoting a successful radio station. The station must be highly visible at local events to gain a strong, positive, local image. The event should be one that is of significant interest for the station's target audience and that fits their lifestyle and the station's image. The following

11.18 Contesting

The traditional promotional stunt is the contest, but the industry favors the term “word game.” Many people think they cannot win contests, but they like to play games. For many stations, a contest approach emphasizes a superprize of \$25,000 or more. Such amounts can be offered only a few times each year (during the Arbitron survey sweeps). And because a station cannot afford to risk losing the big prize on the first day of the game, winning has to be made difficult.

Traditional promotion theory holds that people are more likely to think they can win a small prize than succeed in a \$25,000 treasure hunt or win a safe containing \$50,000. With a superprize, one person is made happy, but thousands are disappointed. Thus, it would be better to break up the \$25,000 prize into \$250 prizes and scatter them through a more extended period. But the growth of huge national station groups has added an interesting twist. Those stations regularly pool resources and jointly run a contest with larger daily or weekly prizes than would be possible for a single station or single market cluster. Thus, instead of giving away \$102 (or whatever number corresponds to a station’s dial position) in the birthday game, a station may award several thousand dollars to the one hundredth caller. The catch is that the same prize is being offered simultaneously by the morning jocks on dozens or hundreds of stations across the country, making the odds of winning infinitesimal, although many in the local audience may not realize it unless they listen very carefully to the contest rules.

There are three steps to properly promoting a contest: (1) Tell ‘em you’re gonna do it: “It’s coming—your chance to win a zillion dollars!” (2) Do it: “Listen every morning at 7:20 for the song of the day. When you hear it played later in the day, be the first caller at 555-0000 and win the money!” (3) Tell ‘em you did it: “KPPP congratulates Mary Jones of your town, winner of a zillion dollars in the KPPP song-of-the-day game!” (and preferably include Mary’s hyperexcited response to winning as part of the message). It is important to avoid giving exact addresses on the air. The station might be legally culpable if a robbery or other crime occurs. Also, in order to discourage possible unpleasantness for their listeners, many DJs do not use the last names of callers on the air.

Exercise caution when recording and airing telephone conversations. It is illegal to record and play back a phone call unless the person being recorded is informed of the recording and consents before recording starts or could reasonably assume from circumstances that the call might be recorded and aired. Thus, most stations avoid call-outs because the phone-call target does not respond spontaneously after going through the consent process. Listeners who call in to the studio phone line, however, are assumed to be aware that their voice may go out on the air. Management should seek legal counsel on call-out questions and should write specific instructions for programming personnel on how call-out calls are to be handled.

are community promotions that, depending on the format and market, might benefit both the station and the community:

- The station’s van (often wrapped or decaled with the station’s logos, armed with CDs, bumper stickers and T-shirts) sets up a tent and broadcasts live outside a venue before a big concert.
- Station jocks emceeding community events or the county fair.
- Two or three jocks take the van and sound equipment to the beach (or a public park) on the Fourth of July to provide music and “freebies” to listeners and friends.

- Stations near rivers or lakes may purchase (or more likely hire) a boat to cruise around passing out t-shirts, drink coozies or other recreation goodies to people who are listening to the radio station on weekends in the summer.
- The station runs announcements and then helps collect clothing and other items to benefit the victims of a recent tornado by letting people drop off goods at the station and has the station van parked at different collection points in the community.

Radio stations will also seek out various charity events in the community that also matter to the listeners. For example, in most communities, radio

11.19 Constraints on Programming and Promotion

Radio broadcasters have to be aware of myriad rules, regulations and guidelines. To keep up with them, radio programmers read trade journals, retain legal counsel specializing in communication law, and join the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) as well as state broadcast organizations. Programmers have to be aware of legal constraints that may limit their ingenuity. Illegal or unethical practices such as fraud, lotteries, plugola and the like can cost a fine, a job or even a license.

Contests and Games The principal point to remember about on-air contests and games is to keep them open and honest, fully disclosing the rules of the game to listeners. Conniving to make a contest run longer or to produce a certain type of winner means trouble.

The perennial problem with many brilliant contest ideas is that, by the FCC's definition, they are lotteries—and advertising of lotteries is explicitly prohibited by federal law (although there are many exemptions for things like legal commercial casinos and Indian gaming, charity bingo nights, and state lotteries). If your contest includes a prize, requires some form of consideration and is a game of chance, it is a lottery and probably illegal. (*Consideration* here refers to payment of some kind—which could be money or extraordinary effort—that needs to be made in order for someone to be allowed to participate in a contest.) Consult the station's lawyers or the NAB legal staff if there is the slightest question.

Because of the way it conducts national contests across multiple stations in the group, at least one large group has also run afoul of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) rules regarding deceptive advertising practices. The stations were accused of misleading listeners about the nature of the contest and their chances of winning by failing to make the multimarket, multistation nature of the contest sufficiently clear in the rules (which must be broadcast several times each day during the run of the promotion) and by broadcasting the winners' comments without identifying them as residents of other markets (thus implying they were local residents).

Sounds That Mislead Similarly, opening promos or commercials with sirens or other attention-getting gimmicks (such as "Bulletin!") cause listeners to believe unjustifiably that they are about to receive vital information. Listener attention can be gained in other more responsible ways that do not offend FCC rules or deceive listeners. Monitoring locally produced commercials or promos for misleading production techniques is especially important. Similarly, hoaxes perpetrated by air talent, even in the name of entertainment, can result in FCC penalties. For example, a station in St. Louis was cited for airing a phony emergency alert (on April Fool's Day) that claimed that the United States was under attack. Particularly offensive in the commission's view was the DJ's use of the actual emergency alert tone at the beginning of the bit to heighten the realism.

Plugola and Payola Fifty years ago, the radio industry was rocked by a series of *payola* scandals involving some of the industry's biggest names and stations, in which bribes were paid by record promoters to DJs in return for playing certain songs on the air. The bribes could be in the form of cash but just as often involved drugs, sex, trips or other inducements. Although a number of reforms were implemented in the 1960s, record promotion (the attempt to influence airplay) remains a high-stakes, high-pressure part of the music and radio businesses. Similarly, announcers who "plug" their favorite bar, restaurant or theater (in return for goods or services) are asking for trouble for themselves and the licensees (*plugola*). Certainly, any tainted jock is likely to be fired instantly. Most responsible licensees require air personnel to sign statements once every six months confirming that they have not been engaging in any form of *payola* or *plugola*; some require drug tests for their employees.

Program Logs Any announcement associated with a commercial venture should be logged as commercial matter (CM), even though the FCC has done away with requirements for program logs per se. Logs have many practical applications aside from the former legal requirement, including advertising billing, record keeping, format maintenance and format organization.

stations are heavily involved in events like Relay for Life, and will align themselves with large national charities like the American Cancer Society, American Red Cross or the National Diabetes Association.

Some stations will also leverage their audiences to put on radiothons once a year to benefit charities like St. Jude Children's Research Hospital or Children's Miracle Network. It is perfectly acceptable for

a station to ask listeners to donate to a cause, and most listeners are happy to oblige for their favorite station, but care should be taken to not ask listeners to give too much or too often as it may have the opposite effect and alienate the listener.

Many station owners now expect promotional efforts (aside from those done for charity) to directly generate nontraditional revenue for the station. These events are similar to traditional promotion in the ways they try to connect the station to the audience's lifestyle. But nowadays, the station's sales staff (or a single, dedicated NTR account executive) works with the promotion director and PD to put together a package that will involve several large advertisers in an event. The projects can take many forms, but a typical one for many is the "Taste of ..." The stations sell sponsorships to food and beverage distributors, which gain the sponsors plenty of visibility on all promotional literature and often exclusive rights in their product category to sell at the event (a single beer distributor, for example).

At the same time, the parent station group can use the event to promote several of its adult formats (AC, news/talk, country, some variants of rock and urban) on its other stations. Local restaurants can purchase booth space to offer their products. Live music or other entertainment can be involved, creating an additional potential revenue stream in the form of tickets for attendance (but be sure the station can at least cover the cost!).

Some stations will go so far as to build entire promotions in an NTR environment. For example, a sales rep may get a local car dealership to agree to trade a Jeep Wrangler in exchange for being given the promotion plus the cost of additional advertising, and a local marina or powersports dealer is brought on board to trade a JetSki with a similar arrangement. The station makes money on the advertising schedule and now has a Jeep and a JetSki to giveaway, simply for mentioning the dealers in airtime that would have already been dedicated to a promotion. Theoretically, everyone wins: the station has a great grand prize to give away just in time for summer (and makes money), and because of the listener's frenzy to try to win the grand prize, the advertisers build name recognition (and hopefully

sell additional vehicles) by being associated with the promotion.

The key to strong promotion of a station is visibility, and the station should be everywhere the target listener would be in the community. This is becoming an increasing struggle for those stations who continue to cut back both promotion and air staff. Radio stations need people to succeed, and those stations that find ways to retain their staff and keep the station visible will be those that succeed in the coming years.

News and Other Nonentertainment Programming

The FCC has no formal requirements for nonentertainment programming, although licensees are required to ascertain the problems, needs and interests of their communities (by whatever means they deem appropriate) and to provide programming that addresses those issues. Each station's public file must contain a quarterly list of programming that the licensee has broadcast to meet those needs.

Stations targeting younger listeners often do not want to carry news, believing that their listeners are bored by it. (However, adult-oriented stations must provide information to their audiences, especially during morning drivetime.) News, public affairs and "other" nonentertainment programming create a flow or continuity problem for the format. The complaint is, "We have to shut down the radio station to air that junk." Junk, of course, is any programming not directly related to the music format. However, that assumes that all nonentertainment content must be long form. The programmer's trick is weaving into the format an appropriate kind and amount of nonentertainment material, which can be effectively woven into any format. Much important information, from traffic and weather reports to upcoming events in the community, can be dished out in 60, 30 or 10 seconds, for example. *Public service announcements (PSAs)* are both nonentertainment and community-oriented programming, and a station can make significant contributions to

the community welfare with an aggressive PSA policy. The key for programmers is to be as careful and deliberate about the choices they make with this material as they are with their music. These nonentertainment elements should be as timely and relevant to the lives of the target audience as the music. The morning jock shouldn't be wasting several minutes rehashing the weekend on Monday morning—he or she should be letting listeners know whether to grab their umbrellas or their sunglasses as they struggle to get out their doors and off to work. On Thursday and Friday, the afternoon-drive talent should be focused on events coming up that weekend as well as on helping the audience avoid the overturned semi at the airport freeway exit.

Radio will probably always be a service medium, and broadcasters will always differ on what constitutes community service. In a competitive major market served by a number of communications media such as newspaper, cable, television, radio, MMDS, LPTV and DTH satellite, the FM radio station that plays wall-to-wall rock music is doubtlessly providing a service, even though it is solely a music service. When the audience has so many options for music, from iPods to satellite radio, a programmer must ask just what it is that the station provides that will convince the audience to listen. In information-poor markets, owners may elect to mix talk shows with music, air editorial comments on community affairs, and in general provide useful information to the community. The services and information provided should be based on competitive market factors, the owners' and managers' personal choices, and a realistic understanding of the role a radio station can play in the particular market situation.

The Big News Question

Do listeners want news on music stations? Early studies by consultants concluded that a large percentage of rock listeners were “turned off” by news. These same listeners also hated commercials, PSAs and anything else not related to music and fun. Some studies found, however, that everybody

wanted lots of news on their music stations. More contemporary views hold that the task for programmers is to find news and information that is relevant to the target audience because it will provide an important component in the overall station identity. Listeners do value information—but *only if they understand how it is relevant to their lives right now*.

Some thinking on news scheduling hinges on the habits of listeners and Arbitron's method of calculating ratings by the quarter-hour: The idea is to hold a listener for at least five minutes in any quarter hour by playing some music so that the station will get credit in a listener diary even if the listener tunes away at news time. News is therefore often placed in the middle of one or two 15-minute periods each hour. This strategy assumes that a significant number of listeners are turned away by news. Music stations, especially those targeting younger listeners, have generally eliminated newscasts except in morning drivetime.

Journalistic Content

Having decided where to put news, the programmer must then decide how to handle it. For some stations, it is enough to have jocks (or sidekicks) **rip and read** newswire copy as it comes out of the machine. Some have been tempted to satisfy the need for local news by simply stealing from the local newspaper or *USA Today*. Programmers tempted to go this route should be aware, however, that stations have been successfully sued under copyright law for engaging in this practice. Although the facts of the news cannot be copyrighted, the specific expression of those facts can be.

On a slightly more elevated level, there are now local news services available that will provide local and regional news (including traffic and weather) for any station willing to pay for the service. The best known of these is Metro, a service that Westwood One sold to Clear Channel in 2011. The advantage to the station is the ability to deliver timely and valuable local information at less than what it would cost to hire its own news staff. The disadvantage is the loss of any exclusivity. The same reporter filing

the story for your station on the downtown fire and resulting traffic jam at 8:05 A.M. is likely to be on your competition at 8:08 (or 8:03).

Another option is to enter into a joint agreement with one of the local television stations or the local newspaper. The local evening television news anchor or a sports reporter may be a valuable addition to the radio station's morning show, and the teaming has promotional advantages for each company. Some clustered stations have adopted a variation of this cross-promotional approach if the cluster includes a news or news/talk AM station—the FM music stations get their morning news from the AM station news staff. Opinions are divided about the advisability of identifying the anchor as from the FM or the AM station during an FM newscast; some stations believe that maintaining a single brand identity is crucial to the station's image and success, while others trade on the legitimacy associated with the news station by identifying the anchor as being from that station. The lack of exclusivity is still an issue.

Programmers who set the highest goals for themselves do well to hire at least two persons to staff the news operation who trade anchoring and reporting duties during the day. This news operation would be extremely luxurious for a music station, however. The typical full-time news staff in radio stations throughout the country—if they have one—is one person, perhaps supplemented by part-time stringers or a service. And even at stations that have a news staff, the news staff is most likely serving multiple stations in a market.

Network and Syndicated Programming

For economic reasons or other factors, stations may not wish to locally program 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Thanks to digital technology, satellites and the internet, national or regional programming is easily available from either a radio network or a radio syndicator. Both offer similar types of programming, but they can be distinguished by the nature of the relationship between the program supplier and the local

station. Networks provide an integrated, full-service product (music, news, air talent, national spots, other features) that airs simultaneously on all affiliated stations, while syndicators provide one element (a single program, a music service and so on) to individual stations that may sometimes air the material at different times.

National and regional syndication can be divided into three categories: short form, long form and continuous music formats. A program of sufficiently broad appeal can run in more than one format (thus increasing the odds that the supplier will be able to sell the program in most markets). Stations use short-form programs as spice in the schedule, airing most longer syndicated fare on weekends or at night (some network material may air in other dayparts). Many syndicators and networks also provide material not only for broadcast but also for online platforms (podcasts, website content, etc.). Short-form offerings include individual network newscasts as well as syndicated programs and series. Many syndicators provide material not only for broadcast but also for online platforms (podcasts and other digital content). Familiar long-form programming includes shows that run several hours on a daily or weekly basis, for example, Cumulus' *American Country Countdown* with Kix Brooks or *American Top 40* with Ryan Seacrest from Premiere Radio Networks (a Clear Channel subsidiary). In addition to Cumulus and Premiere, major national syndicators include Dial Global (www.dial-global.com), Westwood One and United Stations (www.usrn.com).

Continuous music formats are just what the name suggests—24-hour, 7-day-a-week music selections. Until the late 1970s, stations programmed their own music or purchased long-form all-music programming tapes from such syndicators as Drake-Chenault. Syndicated formats are available from a number of companies, including many of those mentioned above. The increased availability of satellite delivery in the 1980s brought a new type of national music programming service—the full-time, live network radio format. Modern satellite-delivered networks supply the combined services of a traditional network (news and advertising)

and a formatted program service (music and entertainment programs). Satellite Music Network (SMN) was the first provider of real-time satellite radio in ten different music formats, including two versions of country, two rock formats, two formats targeted toward adult African-Americans, two adult contemporary formats, one version of nostalgia and one version of oldies. That service was eventually consolidated with ABC Radio (www.abcradio.com), and is now owned by Citadel. Dial Global, part of the TM Studios company, is another major provider of network music formats. There are others who offer a limited number of formats, including United Stations.

The decision to go with one of these services instead of locally generated programming can reduce operating costs by one-half. About half of all commercial stations use at least some national or regional radio programming, from overnight filler to 24-hour turnkey operations (in turnkey arrangements, management is turned over to another entity). Although local programming is desirable, nationally programmed song selections are based on the kinds of professional research that smaller local stations find difficult to afford. Using a network or syndicated format package, a small-market station can achieve a consistent "big-market" sound with a recognized appeal to audiences and advertisers.

Network formats offer a complete package that includes practically everything but local commercials. *Syndicated* formats at their most basic provide only music that is intended for use on fully automated stations. A station running a syndicated format may choose to run without air talent or may use local air talent, or for an additional fee the syndicator may also provide voice-tracking service. Unlike networks, format syndicators traditionally do not sell commercial time or produce newscasts.

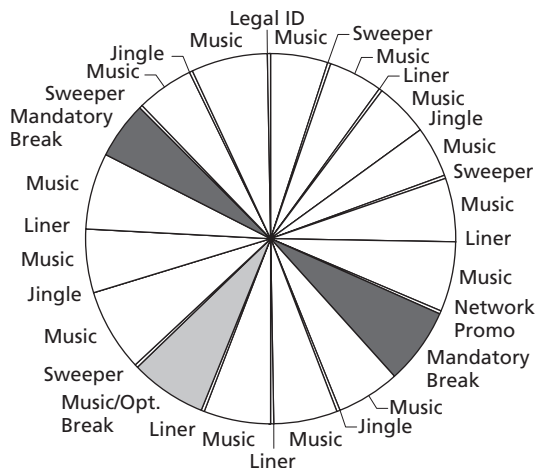
Network formats are generally available on a barter basis (two minutes per hour is the norm), although stations in unrated markets or brand-new stations may be required to take the service on a cash-plus-barter contract. Full-time satellite programming eliminates the need for large staffs, large facilities and large equipment budgets. In the most extreme form, current digital automation systems allow stations to replace a complex of air studios, production

studios and a programming/production staff of several people with a small production studio (for local commercials, weather forecasts and so on), an on-air computer and a staff of one or two. In smaller markets, going with such a service may allow a reformatted station to break even in less than a year.

Like a locally produced format, the network or syndicated service operates from a clock, each hour following a set pattern of music sweeps, some combination of mandatory and optional stopsets and perhaps other material (jingles, sweepers and so on). The typical network clock shown in 11.20 might be used in the daytime for an oldies or AC format. There are 11 minutes of avails in three stopsets: 2 minutes for the network (the first minute in each mandatory break) and 9 for the local station. Also note the long music sweep (or two long sweeps if the local station doesn't take the optional break at about 35 minutes after the hour), and note the opportunities for *localization* (liners to be recorded by the network air talent as well as things that can be done within the station breaks).

Local stopsets and other content are triggered at the local station by a network command using subaudible tones (different tones can be used to trigger different local elements). After the three- or four-minute

11.20 Network Clock



break, the station's automation system then seamlessly rejoins the network at the appropriate point. For liners, the network channel is kept open, so the liner plays over the music as a song fades or the intro begins.

In the late 1990s, many of the networks and syndicators settled on a single technological standard for satellite receivers provided by StarGuide Digital Networks (www.starguidedigital.com). At each mandatory break, the local station must fill the time with local content, such as commercials, promos, PSAs, weather and traffic. The network then uses this time to send important information (last-minute changes in the network's lineup of air talent or the network's spot log, for example) or other material (such as copies of the network commercials for use in hours where local stations are not using the full network feed) to the affiliated stations using their regular channel. In an optional break, the network will program a precisely timed song so stations that don't have local spots scheduled there can continue with music.

It's a system that can be a bit awkward at times for the network PD—after all, how many songs in a particular format remain popular and run exactly 3:30? The timed song is generally a secondary gold or oldies because the programmer wouldn't want to miss playing a top current hit in its regular rotation.

The key to successfully operating with a satellite-delivered format is effective localization—making the station sound like a part of the community even though the programming isn't locally produced. Networks offer major-market-quality personalities, thoroughly tested and carefully scheduled music and (sometimes) network news.

Another part of their service is aimed at helping stations localize the product, but it is always up to the local station to direct the effort. At the request of the local station, network talent will record local station IDs, liners and other voice tracks (intros to weather or news, contest wraps so that the tenth caller sounds like she's talking to the network DJ and so on). These are then sent to the local station for insertion in the programming. Most stations have their call letters or slogans voice tracked by the appropriate network talent. Placed at the start of every break, song intro or *backsell* (telling the

audience what music is coming up or what just played), the slogan sounds to the listener like the network DJ is at the station. Most of this process is really common sense and involves little more than the kinds of things a programmer would do if the air talent were indeed at the station (for example, having the air talent repeat the call letters or slogan when coming out of music, so the station and music are associated in the listener's mind).

But it's surprising how many stations fail to follow through and wind up sounding like a satellite station because they create localizing material too infrequently or irregularly. Others make the mistake of completely eliminating local programming and production personnel, leaving account executives to write and produce commercials and the receptionist to voice track a weather forecast a couple of times a day—employees who are often without the training or talent to effectively execute those tasks.

Local information remains important: regardless of the market, people still want the weather forecast; they want survive-the-day information like traffic during the morning and afternoon drivetimes, and they expect the local radio station to provide it. Many network-affiliated stations adopt a middle-ground approach, running local information in morning drivetime and perhaps during one or two additional shifts during the day while using the satellite primarily at night and on weekends. Most networks require the affiliated stations to air the scheduled network spots, however, even during hours when the station is not airing the network programming.

One downside to running full-service satellite-delivered music programming is the lack of control at the local station. Sometimes the network personality talks too much or makes inappropriate comments. One station became upset when the network DJ (in Dallas) told Christmas listeners to "avoid the crowds and stay in today," which was then followed by local commercials asking people to do exactly the opposite! By choosing a format syndicator, a station may exert more control because the music and all other program elements (especially DJ tracks) can be located (and therefore altered or eliminated as needed) at the station. The price of such control, however, is paying someone to mind

the format, to handle voice tracking and ads. For locally controlled stations, this is not a huge concern, and format syndication works well. For an automated station with a distant owner and a skeleton staff, however, the network format is a better option.

Concerts and Specials

Special music programs have long been popular with both stations and advertisers. Concerts command premium prices because they provide exclusive access to top-ranked music in a live setting. Some acts are particularly valuable because they cross over a variety of station formats (for example, from country to AC, like Shania Twain or Alternative to CHR, like Green Day), making it fairly easy for some music shows to air on at least one station in most markets. Since the mid-1990s, however, only a few musical megastars have been able to attract audiences on the scale necessary for both meeting the costs associated with national production and distribution and justifying local stations' preemption of regular programming. (Access to these rare concerts and major performers remains beyond the financial reach of most local stations on an individual basis.)

Syndicators capable of recording such shows generally offer them to stations on a barter or cash-plus-barter basis at prices ranging from \$25 to \$50 per hour in small markets to several hundred dollars per hour in large markets. Networks may include these music specials as part of the full-service network programming of music, news and sports. Networks can also go into the syndication business, offering music specials on a station-by-station basis.

As with any other type of network program, *the key to revenue for a music special or concert series is the size of its cleared audience.* Fitting a particular concert or series of concerts to a demographic category that matches a salable number of affiliates is very difficult. Most of these programs target either the youth demographic, aged roughly 18 to 34 (it may include teens), or the adult demographic, aged 25 to 54. Each group presents programming problems, and local stations can be understandably reluctant to preempt traditional programming that

they know will deliver a given audience and amount of revenue for an unknown. Stations will expect a careful fit between special programs and their regular formats. Contemporary radio listeners have many choices and are ready to push a button if the sound or voices are too staid, too serious or otherwise perceived as “not for them.”

For a network that seeks musical concerts and specials, three alternative strategies exist:

- Produce many shows of varied appeal to capture fragments of the youth or adult audiences.
- Concentrate on the relatively small number of stars that appeal across the broadest format spectrum.
- Buy or produce programs that have unique, broad appeal.

The third strategy is often the most economically efficient, although many national programmers also follow the first strategy to at least some extent. For example, countdown shows target specific groups who will listen to a wide variety of music over the course of the show. Countdown shows succeed best as regularly scheduled weekend features, and audiences tend to seek them out. These unique music programs usually clear the broadest range of affiliates, which makes them potentially the most profitable syndicated programs and competitive with top-rated radio sports.

Feature Syndicators

Radio broadcasters may use features to attract a specific target audience during mornings, evenings or weekends. Most popular syndicated feature programs are brief inserts such as the *ET Radio Minute*, *Late Show with David Letterman Top-Ten List* and *CBS HealthWatch*. Stations producing their own programming include short features to add spice and variety to programming and use the longer programming to fill unsold or low-audience time periods.

Syndicated features are as varied as their producers, which include many of the companies previously mentioned in this chapter: Dial Global, Cumulus, Premiere Radio Networks (www.premiereradio.com), Westwood One and United Stations are

among the biggest. A few major-market stations also syndicate their talent (for example, KLOS in Los Angeles offers morning duo Mark & Brian to stations in other markets).

One of the most important types of feature programming today is the syndicated morning show. Several successful major-market morning shows have made the transition to national syndication, including Kid Kraddick (Dallas), Rick Dees (Los Angeles), Mancow Muller (Chicago) and Bob & Tom (Indianapolis). As with the other programming discussed in this section, a syndicated morning show can offer small- and medium-market stations talent that would otherwise be far beyond their reach, albeit at a still significant cost in cash and avails.

A wide range of styles are available, from Bob & Tom's Midwestern, occasionally risqué, humor to the outrageous and frequently offensive style of Mancow. As with all choices, programmers should be aware of the tastes and interests of their audience and market when selecting a syndicated morning show. All of the shows can point to significant ratings successes; most have also failed in some markets where they were on the wrong station or the show was just not appropriate for the market.

Many companies that syndicate long-form format packages also supply short features that fit within their long formats and provide other prep services for local air talent (entertainment news, joke services, other short items that can be used on the air). The short features are also made available to other stations in the same market on a format-exclusive basis. If a feature is format-exclusive, that same short feature can be sold to more than one station in a market if their formats differ, but only one rock or one country or one talk station can license the program. This arrangement assumes non-duplicated listeners.

What's Coming for Radio?

It's clear that "radio" will no longer be delivered only via broadcast transmission but also via other wireless (and wired) services. While the greatest threat to radio as it existed is 4G wireless broadband

services because they will further fragment the audience and reduce the time spent with other media including radio. At the same time, terrestrial broadcasters retain significant competitive advantages over many of the competing technologies, because radio remains free to the listener, plus stations have the ability to make use of those same next-generation platforms to distribute their content to listeners who prefer those platforms.

Changing technology and listener lifestyles have left local stations with no exclusive property in music genres or key artists to be used as a competitive driver in a market. That's not to say that music will disappear as a programming staple. It remains attractive to a large audience and is a very cost-effective way to fill time. But personality and local service—the things offered besides the music on a station—has always been the soul of successful radio. These are things that Pandora, Spotify and similar newer entrants to the audio space do not (and probably will never) offer. Thus, many local stations will best be able to fend off the challenge from newer services by emphasizing their people and their local commitment, along with their free cost to the audience and their availability everywhere their audience wants them to be.

On the other hand, stations have to be present in the mobile space (smartphones, tablets) as audiences—especially younger audiences—move more (and, in some cases, all) of their media use to those platforms. Apple leads that market as we write this; but the lead is shrinking rapidly and the Android operating system will almost certainly be the dominant mobile platform by the time you're reading this chapter (and Blackberry may have disappeared). In any case, stations will probably need to have apps running on at least a couple of platforms so the only real question is which one is the most important—where to start when you launch something new? The answer to that question, as has been the case for radio, begins by understanding on what devices and where your audience is most likely listening.

Convenience (as defined by the listener) will be the primary driver for strategic decision making in almost every case. The mantra recited by leaders in most media companies is "the content you want,

anytime, anywhere.” While there are still occasional licensing hurdles to overcome before that ideal can be realized, those barriers are fewer for radio than for other media businesses. The radio companies that survive will do so by not only creating compelling broadcast fare but also through the development of mobile apps and by taking advantage of distribution platforms in addition to the broadcast signal—by making that content available in a wide range of forms and engaging listeners in whatever way that listeners prefer.

The industry consolidation that followed the 1996 Telecommunications Act has permanently and fundamentally altered the strategies and economics of radio programming and thus the day-to-day nature of the work the employees of those groups perform. Owners and programmers seek to counter the technological pressures fragmenting the audience by finding different ways of engaging their fans. This requires leveraging their best talent across not only multiple stations (probably in multiple markets) but also across multiple platforms. Your morning jock or team doesn’t just do four or five hours on the air. She, he or they (or, more likely, their producer) will certainly also be expected to produce high-involvement content for all the other platforms including the station’s website, perhaps a daily podcast (or series of podcasts) available for listeners to download or stream to their smartphone or tablet or desktop. Personas or characters they create could be extended into other media, from video to games that listeners can play on their mobile device—either within a station app or as a stand-alone ... anything that keeps the audience engaged.

The nature of ownership is also changing. Although there may be some exceptions (Cumulus), most radio owners are no longer looking to emulate

the Clear Channel approach of the past decade. Indeed, even Clear Channel slimmed down after the company was taken private, shedding many smaller stations and some other lines of business. Rather than trying to dominate everywhere, groups such as Merlin (a large market example) and Townsquare Media (a small-market example) are focused on more narrowly defined geographic, demographic, product and market-size segments; or on providing services to companies in those markets (such as Triton Digital). Other entrepreneurs are individuals or groups focused primarily on new media audio opportunities presented by the spread of 4G networks and platforms. All of them are hoping to prosper in the changing marketplace; and, most importantly, none of them believe that “radio is dead.”

Notes

1. Arbitron, “Radio Today 2010,” p. 87. This study is available at www.arbitron.com.
2. See <http://ibiquity.com/automotive> for updated figures.
3. Arbitron and Edison Media Research, “The Infinite Dial 2011.” This study is part of an annual series and is available at www.arbitron.com and www.edisonmedia.com. See more recent versions of this study for updates on listening patterns.
4. In the United States, the AM band runs from 520 to 1710 kilohertz (kHz), with station allocations spaced at 10-kHz intervals. The FM band runs from 88 to 108 megahertz (MHz), with allocations spaced every .2 MHz beginning with 88.1 (then 88.3, 88.5 and so on through 107.9), although the lower 4 MHz (88.1 through 91.9) are reserved for noncommercial educational (NCE) stations only. Note that interference concerns will prevent assignments of stations on adjacent frequencies within a market.

Information Radio Programming

Matthew S. Pierce and Robert F. Potter

Chapter Outline

Information Versus Entertainment Radio

- Identifiable Personalities
- Branding Stations and On-Air Personalities

The Rise of Information Radio

- Cost Decline in Distribution Technology
- The Abandonment of the Fairness Doctrine
- Embracing Formerly Taboo Topics
- Migration to FM
- Mobile Phones
- Synergistic Advertising Environment

Information Programming Formats

All-News Formats

- Network-Delivered Newscasts
- News Scheduling Priorities

Talk Formats

- Heritage Talk
- Politics/Issues Talk
- Sports Talk
- Success Talk
- Hot Talk
- Urban Talk
- Faith Talk
- Spanish/Foreign-Language Talk
- Health and Help Talk
- Technology Talk

The Content Infrastructure

- Hosts
- Callers and Listeners
- Commercial Interests

On-Air Talk Techniques

- Telephone Screeners
- Controversy, Balance, and Pressure

Information Formats on Public Radio

What Lies Ahead

Notes

Just what is meant by *information radio*? It is traditionally viewed by broadcasters as a fairly expansive term encompassing various formats where the spoken word—rather than music—makes up the main content feature. These formats occur on satellite radio channels and the internet as well as on analog and digital terrestrial broadcasting, and are known individually by such names as talk, news, news/talk and sports talk. All fall under the larger umbrella of information radio but raise the following question for programmers: What is the overall goal of information radio—is it to educate or to entertain its audience?¹

Information Versus Entertainment Radio

A quick first answer is that with a name like *information radio*, the format must be designed to educate (and that sounds boring). However, some industry analysts believe all radio formats—not just delivering the news or talk about issues—function to educate and are thus a form of information radio. If this sounds extreme, consider that about 14 percent of the broadcast stations in the United States are officially programmed as what the industry calls *information radio*, that is, full-time talk, news or sports (Ahh: not so boring to fans). Add to that another 12 percent of stations categorized as programming religious or Christian formats offering a focused type of information (in the form of sermons, religion-themed talk shows, call-in prayer shows and so on) to an audience with a specific psychographic profile. Of the remaining 74 percent of stations, most schedule some talk, some news or some sports, typically during drivetimes, in late night and on the weekends, even though their “official” formats are some sort of music programming. In addition, surprisingly, more than 90 channels on the SiriusXM satellite service focus on information rather than music. Even noncommercial radio stations—those that we usually associate with classical music, opera and jazz—devote substantial portions of their programming to delivering information in the form of large news blocks (*Morning Edition* and *All*

Things Considered), interview shows (*Talk of the Nation*, *Fresh Air* with Terry Gross and *The Tavis Smiley Show*), comedy (*A Prairie Home Companion* and *Wait, Wait ... Don't Tell Me!*), and call-in talk shows such as the hilarious *Car Talk*.

Even the most highly targeted “all music” stations provide generous amounts of information to their audiences in the form of pop psychology, humorous stories and discussions of “what’s hot,” all presented in the latest lingo of the target audience. These stations know that, even though they tie their brand images closely to their music mix, to succeed in the ratings they still must offer substantial amounts of useful information to their listeners—such as traffic, weather and lifestyle news—especially during drivetime dayparts.

If you are still having trouble thinking of *all* radio as information radio, consider that more than one-fifth of the average commercial radio station’s airtime is set aside for advertising and promotion—almost all forms of which contain spoken information about products, services or the station itself. Even commercial-free public radio uses enhanced underwriting announcements between programs.

Furthermore, the on-air signal is only part of a modern radio station’s or satellite service’s business strategy. Stations and their program hosts now take advantage of multiple distribution paths to reach an audience. Podcasts, online streaming and apps for smartphones and tablets make content available to listeners whenever and wherever they want to listen. A station’s or satellite service’s reach now goes beyond the radio waves that carry its signal.

The challenge for content providers, whether they are traditional broadcast stations or webcasters, is to “monetize” these various distribution paths (often referred to as *platforms*). *That means finding a way to make money from the content no matter how it is delivered.* For example, advertising may support a talk program delivered to listeners over an AM broadcast station, but that *same content* can be provided commercial-free to a listener’s smartphone through an app that requires a subscription fee to access the content.

Consultant Kipper McGee observes that traditional broadcasting seeks to import listeners to a

station by encouraging them to tune to the station's frequency ("Hear weather and traffic on the 10s!"), but now broadcasters also have the opportunity to export their stations' content to listeners in ways that allow them to consume the content on their own time schedule.²

Station websites have evolved from simply offering information about station events, biographies of station DJs and personalities, and details on movies, concerts and other happenings in the station's city of license. Now they export content through daily podcasts, free downloads and live streams of the station's broadcast signal. Websites encourage greater interaction with visitors and link to social media sites such as Facebook.

Chicago music station WXRT, for example, invites listeners to become an "XRT VIP" and "access exclusive experiences and XRT ticket giveaways." VIPs get access to the "XRT VIP lounge" where they can earn points by participating in station promotions, filling-out surveys, using advertisers' coupons and clicking through to advertiser websites. Earned points can then be used to enter contests, participate in online auctions or trade for prizes.

The VIP lounge has elements of popular social media games and gives listeners an incentive to participate in marketing campaigns they might otherwise avoid. WXRT "monetized" its website by creating a place where businesses can reach potential customers.

So, a lot of information is being disseminated by radio stations and their personalities, regardless of format, both on and off the air. However, many industry consultants believe it's more important for all stations—even those that are formally information formats—to focus on being a source of *entertainment* for listeners. These analysts suggest that a station can dominate in ratings and revenue only when it is programmed as a form of audio entertainment. *The most successful news/talk/sports programmers require their air talents to remain focused on the entertainment value of their presentations.* According to consultant Holland Cooke, both information stations and popular music stations "play the hits," but in information radio that

means discussing the hot topics and news that the audience really wants to hear.³ This attitude puts off serious news junkies, but it makes money.

Just as Chapter 11 discussed how hot songs are tracked by music station programmers in trade magazines like *Billboard*, information station programmers refer to publications like *Talkers Magazine* (www.talkers.com), which offers a Week in Review feature listing the top-10 people, issues and topics being discussed on information stations across the country. *Only programmers and hosts who recognize the importance of presenting these issues in an entertaining way are likely to succeed big time.*

There are plenty of examples in radio history of talk-radio personalities who took themselves too seriously, abandoned their focus on the *entertainment* value of their presentations, and suffered revenue and ratings decline. One personality who suffered from this lack of focus on the entertainment value of her show is Dr. Laura Schlessinger. Her increasingly strident anti-homosexual rhetoric in the late 1990s resulted in censure by the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, a loss of several key U.S. affiliates, and the loss of several national advertisers, including the biggie of Procter & Gamble, which withdrew support from her proposed television show.

Controversy again swirled around Schlessinger in 2010 when she used a racial epithet 11 times while responding to a caller on her radio show. She apologized the next day and then announced she would stop hosting a radio show at the end of her contract, saying she would be freer to speak her mind through books, a YouTube channel, blogs and her website. Nonetheless, in 2011 she copied the path of other program hosts too controversial for broadcast radio and moved her show to satellite radio.

At a radio industry conference, a panel of news/talk programmers clearly explained the entertainment value of their programs. One programmer summed it up this way: "All highly rated radio is, first, entertaining, and in radio there're only two ways to entertain an ear—with spoken words [as in] news/talk or with music. When we got our staff

to realize their spoken words had to be as entertaining as the music down the street, or the movie on HBO, we started to have success.”⁴

To a certain extent, then, *all radio formats have information as a key ingredient*. For some formats, the most engaging way to deliver information is to present it between musical segments the audience will find appealing. In information formats, of course, the majority of the broadcast day is filled not with music, but with the spoken word, and the formats are growing in popularity among programmers and listeners—in the form of all-news, all-talk or the combination of the two known as news/talk. Consider that in 1980, only 75 radio stations in the United States offered full-time information programming. By 1985, that number had grown to only 100 stations. Then, during the next 25 years, the number of stations officially programming the information format skyrocketed! The *Broadcasting Cable Yearbook 2010* listed 2,793 full-time news, talk and news/talk stations—moving ahead of the number of stations with country music formats.

This surge in the number of stations is not the only sign of the format’s popularity. Arbitron’s *Radio Today 2010* reported that information radio also had the second-highest 12+ share of all formats in 2009, with an average 12.9 percent of those listening to the radio at any time tuning to an information station. That was just behind country music’s 13.4 percent share of 12+ listeners. During the historic 2008 presidential election year, information radio had the largest share of 12+ listeners.

Perhaps even more important, large portions of those listening to information programming are in the demographic segments desirable to many advertisers. Moreover, advertisers believe their commercials are more effective in information formats because listeners are more engaged with the content, making it more likely they will actually pay attention to the messages being delivered in advertisements. Do you agree?

Information radio has become popular with programmers because it is a format that really engages listeners. One reason for its persistent popularity is the presentation of timely “hit” topics. However, much of the driving force behind the

format undoubtedly comes from the on-air personalities who present the topics in compelling, interesting and often controversial ways.

Identifiable Personalities

Among dominant information formats, *talk is almost always live and delivered by identifiable personalities*. Having recognizable individuals is extremely important. Research has repeatedly shown that the most loyal radio listeners seek feelings of pseudo-friendship or imagined personal relationships with media personalities. These relationships are evidenced by unexpectedly intense love/hate reactions to national talk hosts such as Howard Stern, Rush Limbaugh, Tom Joyner, Jim Rome, G. Gordon Liddy, Dr. Joy Browne and Phil Hendrie. *An emotional connection, whether positive or negative, has been shown to be absolutely necessary for sustained listener involvement and long-term ratings and revenue success*. A list of selected nationally syndicated and satellite radio talk hosts from *Talkers Magazine*’s “Heavy Hundred,” along with their web addresses, appears in 12.1.

Often even local personalities can develop sizable loyal followings. These hosts tend to be long-time residents of the broadcast city. They know the history of the area, and long-time local listeners develop a sense of having “grown up” with them. Even those new to the area become attracted by how tuned in to the happenings of the city such local personalities are—they know about everything from family activities happening in the coming week to the hot-button local political issues.

Sometimes information stations that have a comparatively small share of the listening audience can still be successful because of the connections they make with their niche audiences and the loyalty that follows. For example, consider WVON-AM (Chicago). Rarely does the talk station register more than one percent of the available listening audience. However, the station has remained successful by developing close ties between its local personalities and its primarily African-American audience. According to communication scholar Catherine Squires, who spent time observing

12.1 Popular Nationally Syndicated or Satellite Radio Talk Hosts

| Talk Personality | Description | Website |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Glenn Beck | "High-profile star of the current conservative talk media genre. King of controversy." | www.glennbeck.com |
| Jim Bohannon | "Seasoned late-night broadcaster with journalistic qualities. Political moderate heard in syndication." | www.jimbotalk.net |
| Sean Hannity | "A multimedia mega star in conservative talk. Solid mainstay of the genre." | www.hannity.com |
| Clark Howard | "Respected consumer advocate and personal financial advice expert." | www.clarkhoward.com |
| Don Imus | "Legendary talk media personality still performing daily syndicated morning show simulcast on cable news/talk TV." | http://www.wabcradio.com/showdj.asp?DJID=40880 |
| Laura Ingraham | "A major fixture in the world of conservative talk entertainment. Top female in talk radio." | www.lauraingraham.com |
| Rush Limbaugh | "Twenty-three years in syndication and still the most important talk show host in America." | www.rushlimbaugh.com |
| George Noory | "Ubiquitous purveyor of late-night paranormal and oddities chat." | www.coasttocoastam.com |
| Dave Ramsey | "A media superstar in the world of personal financial advice and multi-media industry icon." | www.daveramsey.com |
| Randi Rhodes | "Progressive talk radio pro earning success in national syndication" | www.therandirhodesshow.com |
| Jim Rome | "Still the 'champ' of nationally syndicated sports talk radio." | www.jimrome.com |
| Michael Savage | "Boisterous talk radio personality heard on more than 300 affiliates." | www.michaelsavage.com |
| Dr. Laura Schlessinger | "Still an important player with legendary status. Unique personal advice host. Heard exclusively on satellite radio." | www.drlaura.com |
| Bev Smith | "Important player in African American targeted talk radio." | www.aurnol.com |
| Howard Stern | "King of satellite radio and 'pop culture' talk. Still a multi-media superstar and one-of-a-kind radio legend." | www.howardstern.com |

WVON talents and listeners, the station sustains a loyal audience that counts on the station to "talk their talk" when it comes to issues of concern and interest to the African-American audience in the third largest market in the United States. So loyal is the WVON audience, in fact, that Squires reported listeners were willing to make financial contributions to the station when its advertising revenues were lower than anticipated.⁵ Although some of those listed in 12.2 have begun to branch out to national audiences via syndication, their

reputations initially developed by establishing long-term relationships with listeners in their local markets.

Branding Stations and On-Air Personalities

Carrying a syndicated show with an identifiable national personality and developing local talents for the surrounding hours—who then become local household names—should be the goals of every

12.2 Popular Local Hosts

| | | |
|---------------|--------------|--|
| New York | WNYM | www.am970theapple.com |
| | Curtis Sliwa | |
| Los Angeles | KFI | www.kfi640.com |
| | Bill Handel | |
| | KABC | www.kabc.com |
| | Larry Elder | |
| Chicago | WVON | www.wvon.com |
| | Cliff Kelley | |
| | WGN | www.wgnradio.com |
| | Garry Meier | |
| | WLS | www.wlsam.com |
| | Roe Conn | |
| San Francisco | KGO | www.kgoam810.com |
| | Ronn Owens | |
| Dallas | WBAP | www.wbap.com |
| | Mark Davis | |

information radio programmer. How does a programmer identify the right ones?

Arbitron's research revealed an *important fact about strong personalities: Listeners will find them on the dial even if they change stations in the market*. In other words, listeners are often more loyal to the personality than they are to any individual station. A successful program host creates his or her own unique style or "brand." Just as consumers often become loyal to a particular brand of laundry detergent and other products, they can also become loyal followers of a popular on-air personality.

Once a program host has created a unique brand with a loyal audience, he or she can deliver content on many platforms and monetize them to generate profits. In the early days of the internet and before the rise of social media sites, syndicated talk programs used periodic newsletters as a source of revenue for the host and/or syndicator. Rush Limbaugh, for example, offered yearly subscriptions to his monthly newsletter *The Limbaugh Letter* for purchase on his website (www.rushlimbaugh.com). Limbaugh still offers the traditional newsletter, but he has expanded his offerings to take advantage of new digital platforms.

Subscribers to "Rush 24/7" are given access to audio and video podcasts through the iTunes library, including downloads of his minute long "Morning Updates," archives of his complete programs for the past four weeks, live streaming video of him during his radio show, and commercial-free versions of his radio program. (That's a LOT of Rush.) In addition, subscribers can download documents discussed during the show, related articles and audio, plus other reference materials. A free app is available for subscribers who want to consume the content on their smartphones or tablet computers. The 24/7 package even claims to include a super-secret email address that allows subscribers to reach Limbaugh directly.

Some stations or personalities, on the other hand, send out newsletters free of charge in an attempt to make more personal connections with their listeners while also developing databases of contact information for future direct marketing campaigns. Kim Komando, host of a weekly syndicated tech-talk show, also sends out daily computer tips and weekly newsletters via email to millions of people who have signed up for the free service on her website (www.komando.com). Komando also offers alternate access to content through a subscription service called "Kim's Club." For a monthly fee, club members get access to podcasts, streaming audio and streaming video of her (radio) program. Club members are also automatically entered into show contests.

What was once a business of attracting listeners to a broadcast station to boost advertising sales has now become a multi-platform marketing operation. Content is now recycled and repackaged to generate profits long after the program host has said "Good-bye, until tomorrow" to his or her broadcast station listeners.

Scott Betram, program director for Rockford, Illinois, station WROK-AM, is an example of a broadcaster who recognizes the importance of maintaining these many digital platforms. "Website, streaming audio, Twitter, Facebook—they all help put WROK on the computer or cell-phone or iPad of listeners every day. It helps brand us as a news/information/opinion source that will continue to provide content even when the consumer is away from the radio."⁶

Many hosts have further capitalized on their popularity by writing books. For example, Howard Stern's *Private Parts*, Limbaugh's *The Way Things Ought to Be*, Michael Savage's *The Savage Nation*, and Dr. Laura Schlessinger's *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* not only gave those hosts another stream of income, but the publicity the books received likely directed new listeners to their radio programs. Publicity surrounding a new book can be substantial. For example, talk-show host Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie*, a memoir of his time spent with one of his former college professors, lasted over five years on *The New York Times* best-seller list! And every copy sold mentions his daily syndicated radio show originating on WJR-AM in Detroit.

Knowing about syndication agreements is crucial for programmers. National hosts who have developed brands that can generate the most revenues sell themselves for fixed periods of time—one year, two years, etc. Beginning the next round of negotiations with the syndicator at exactly the proper time gives an edge. To continue a station's association with the personality, locking the agreement up early (before a competitor moves in) is an important strategic move.

However, if a programmer, sales manager and general manager decide that a new agreement with the syndicator is not cost-effective because of increases in the contract costs or decreases in projected sales revenue (see Chapter 3 for a related discussion of television syndication), it is better to know sooner rather than later that the station may lose that personality from its programming lineup. It is also not a bad idea to estimate when competitors' national syndication contracts will be renegotiated. It could be that a favorite personality might unexpectedly become available as a result of failed negotiations with a competing station, and a clever information programmer would be ready to act quickly to sign that big-name personality, knowing that his or her loyal audience will follow.

The strong loyalty between listeners and personalities also impacts the information programmer's relationship with local hosts. Often, management insists on *noncompete clauses* in contracts with the most popular "franchise" personalities. These clauses prevent local personalities from leaving one

station and going to another in the same market without a lot of time (sometimes a year or more) passing. The logic behind these clauses is that having noncompetes in place will prevent the personalities from bringing their stations' strategic secrets—along with their loyal listeners—to competitors.

This approach is not without its critics, many of whom argue that noncompete clauses have a negative effect on station morale that does far more harm than any "strategic secrets" that may get into the competition's hands. The American Federation of Radio and Television Artists (AFTRA) continues to lobby state legislatures and Congress to outlaw noncompete clauses in broadcasters' employment contracts. Arizona, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maine and New York are among the states that have made these noncompete clauses unenforceable. Still, the initial motivation for noncompete clauses should not be lost amid the controversy: Once a station has a successful local personality on its airwaves, the programmer needs to try to do everything possible to keep that person there!

The rise in the number of recognizable personalities and the greater loyalty they command are, indeed, important reasons behind the increase in the number of information stations and their ratings successes over recent years. However, other factors also led to the popularity of the format among programmers and the listening public.

The Rise of Information Radio

Aside from social and cultural influences contributing to an interest in information radio, several technological, economic and policy changes have also played a role, especially affecting terrestrial broadcast radio. The six key factors are summarized in 12.3.

Cost Decline in Distribution Technology

The shows of Rush Limbaugh, Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Ed Schultz or others wouldn't be available today without the dramatic drop in the cost of distributing broadcast-quality audio over long distances that

12.3

Factors in the Rise of Talk Radio

1. Decline in distribution costs due to satellite technology
2. Repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987
3. Acceptance of formerly taboo topics
4. Migration of music-oriented audiences to FM
5. Proliferation of cellular phones
6. Attraction of format for advertisers

occurred in the early 1980s. Prior to that time, radio network operators were forced to pay premium fees to the telephone monopolies for land-based distribution. This created the “chicken and egg” question common to most new technologies: Which will come first, the nationally-distributed radio personalities or the expensive distribution system? By the mid-1980s, commercial satellites magically appeared in the sky, and thanks to the much lower cost of satellite distribution, national syndication of unproven programming became economically feasible for the first time. One of the earliest of these shows was Limbaugh’s talk show, and in an interview, Limbaugh noted that his popular show airs during the midday daypart, as opposed to perhaps the more strategically advantageous slot of morning or afternoon drivetime. This occurred because satellite time was only available during the midday hours when his syndicated show was first developed.⁷

The Abandonment of the Fairness Doctrine

Fairness was another problem. Prior to 1987, the FCC’s Fairness Doctrine required radio stations to cover all sides of controversial public issues *equally*. In application, this severely limited the topics aired on talk radio because station owners feared lawsuits or complaints at license renewal time by those who felt they were treated “unequally.” Indeed, both sides of a controversial issue would often claim less

than equal treatment. Because of this, few station owners were willing to take the risk of programming anything more than the blandest kinds of talk. Rather than risk complaints at renewal time, it was easier to avoid all controversy.

The Fairness Doctrine was merely an FCC policy that had not been made law, so the FCC could decide to drop it at any time, and that time arrived at the height of deregulation under the Reagan administration. Although many members of Congress and some lobbyists fought to write the Fairness Doctrine into law, each of three attempts ended in failure. After several years, it became clear that the Fairness Doctrine was not likely to return, and broadcasters subsequently felt increasingly free to engage in even the most outrageously slanted forms of talk programming.

By the early 1990s, radio talk hosts had more freedom than ever before to advocate one view of a controversial issue and ridicule opposing points of view. Show hosts could take—or even distort—one side of an issue and demean opposing perspectives, often with tremendous success in audience ratings. Such talk was apparently much more interesting than talk that tried to be fair or equal to both sides (see 12.4). Despite complaints of extremism, the FCC decided to rely on the marketplace to provide fairness. In theory, if one station took one side of an issue, other stations in the market would program opposing views to attract the disaffected audience. Overall fairness would be found across the dial, rather than forced on each individual station as had been the case before.

By 2000, journalists, media scholars and even politicians were commenting that talk radio—particularly at the national level—had become primarily a haven for such politically conservative hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, G. Gordon Liddy, Ken Hamblin and Sean Hannity. Although this was no problem for the conservatives in the audience, polls showed that almost three-quarters of liberals felt that the information radio format did not provide balanced programming. Many conservatives pointed to failed programs hosted by such liberal icons as Mario Cuomo and Alan Dershowitz as evidence of the marketplace at work.

However, in 2004, Air America Radio debuted on stations in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and